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## An Upstanding Goddess and Mother. Preliminary Thoughts on a Peculiar Depiction of Isis with Harpocrates on some Coins for Julia Domna

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REPORTS OF  
THE YOUNG RESEARCH  
NETWORK

ABSTRACT

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## An Upstanding Goddess and Mother

Preliminary Thoughts on a Peculiar Depiction of Isis with Harpocrates on some Coins for Julia Domna

Julienne N. Schrauder

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The article explores an unusual depiction of the Egyptian goddess Isis with her son Horus on a small group of coins minted for the Roman Empress Julia Domna, the wife of Emperor Septimius Severus. As a basis for the discussion of coins, the database Online Coins of the Roman Empire (OCRE) was used.

**KEYWORDS**

Horus, iconography, Isis, Julia Domna, Roman Imperial numismatics

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# An Upstanding Goddess and Mother

## Preliminary Thoughts on a Peculiar Depiction of Isis with Harpocrates on some Coins for Julia Domna

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Roman Imperial coinage is one of the many sources wherein we can find traces of the impact of cultural contacts in the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity. For about three millennia, pharaonic Egypt had an economic system that did not use coins; only with the Ptolemies, this medium was introduced on a wider scale in the shape of a closed-currency system<sup>1</sup>. After the defeat of Cleopatra VII and thus the change of Egypt from a sovereign country to an – albeit special – province of the *imperium romanum*, the Romans continued to keep the Egyptian coinage from the Alexandrian mint separate from the Imperial issues. It is unsurprising to find Egyptian motives in the Egyptian coinage. But even in the regular Imperial coinage, the increasing use of Egyptian motives might be seen as a mirror of a deepening understanding of the province *Aegyptus* and its culture. Throughout the Empire, the cult of Isis spread quickly. Depictions of Isis in different aspects and roles found their way onto the coins, provincial issues and those from the Roman mint alike. Under Septimius Severus (146–211 CE, reign 193–211 CE), a number of coins for his wife Julia Domna (c. 160–217 CE) show Isis with her son Horus in a rather unusual depiction<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest type of Egyptian coins was minted under Nektanebos II (400–343 BCE) and called *nwb-nfr* (also *nwb-nfr*) »good/perfect gold«. These coins were used to pay foreign mercenaries. See: <https://smb.museum-digital.de/object/147855> (last access: 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023).

<sup>2</sup> The peculiarity of this depiction has already been remarked upon by Claire Rowan. Her assessment that »there is nothing to indicate to the viewer that the figures are Isis and Horus« (Rowan 2011, 252) will be considered below.

## Julia Domna During the Reign of Septimius Severus



1

Fig. 1: MET 25.78.90: Beryl intaglio with portrait of Julia Domna, c. 200–210 CE

2 Whilst the details of the early life of Julia Domna (Fig. 1) herself are mostly lost, some parts of her familial background are known: she hailed from a noble Syrian family, her father Bassianus being the high priest of Elagabal at the city of Emesa. As the second wife of Septimius Severus, whom she married in 187 CE in Lugdunum where he was stationed as *legatus Augusti pro praetore provinciae Galliae Lugdunensis* from 187–189 CE<sup>3</sup>, Julia Domna became the mother of the later emperors Caracalla (born as Bassianus, 188–217 CE) and Geta (189–211 CE). Once her husband had established himself as emperor, she became empress (*augusta*)<sup>4</sup> of the Roman Empire from 193–211 CE.

3 Politically, her husband's reign did not start on firm ground. After the succession of the so-called Adoptive Emperors ended when Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE) named his son Commodus (161–192 CE) as his heir instead of adopting another by merit, the basis for legitimisation had been compromised. This was particularly true after Commodus

was assassinated before providing either an adopted heir or a natural son to succeed him: right after Commodus, Pertinax (126–193 CE) became emperor only to be killed after about three months<sup>5</sup>. Then Didius Julianus (133–193 CE) lasted a mere 66 days in office before being disposed of. Within this short reign falls the proclamation of Septimius Severus as emperor<sup>6</sup>. There were still other claimants to the throne: one adversary, Clodius Albinus (c. 150–197 CE), accepted the title of caesar instead, the other, the governor of Syria, Pescennius Niger (c. 135/140–194 CE), lost to Septimius Severus at Issos and was subsequently killed<sup>7</sup>.

4 Again, the details of what exactly Julia Domna did as empress are far from abundant, but it can be observed that she is prominently featured in restorative works on temples (especially those for the sphere of women and family) and actively participated in the ceremonies for the Secular games<sup>8</sup>. She is also depicted as sacrificing to the gods alongside her family<sup>9</sup>. There was a certain – and seemingly one-sided – rivalry between

3 Weiß 2012, 393. – According to the *Historia Augusta* (Septimius Severus, 3,9), Septimius Severus chose Julia Domna as wife since an oracle had declared her future husband to be a king (*cum audisset esse in Syria quendam, quae id geniturae haberet, ut regi iungeretur, eandem uxorem petit, Iuliam scilicet, et accepit interventu amicorum*). It seems likely that this explanation came after the fact, giving an additional layer of legitimacy to his claim to the role of emperor. The same can be said about a dream of Severus that saw Faustina the younger (c. 130–175 CE), the wife of Marcus Aurelius, prepare their *thalamos* in the temple of Venus (Cass. Dio LXXIV, 3,1; Gorrie 2004, 70 with fns 48–50).

4 Mary Gilmore Williams mentions two medallions that do not include Julia Domna's title as *augusta* that date from very early in the reign of her husband, and goes on that »[t]he imperial name Augusta was given to her during this first year, and is found on all of her inscriptions and on all of her coins except those just mentioned« (Williams 1902, 261).

5 Aur. Vict. Caes. 18 (Groß-Albenhausen – Fuhrmann 2002): »*Eum milites, (...), impulsore Didio foede iuglavere octogesimo imperii die*«.

6 Aur. Vict. Caes. 19.

7 Aur. Vict. Caes. 20, tells that both Clodius Albinus and Pescennius Niger were made to die (*coegit mori*) but fails to mention that there was an interim in which Clodius Albinus was *caesar* under Septimius Severus. Given the number of coins struck for him between 193 to 197 CE, most of which come from the Roman mint, this seems curious. The falling out between Septimius Severus and Clodius Albinus happened later and did lead to infighting until, eventually, Clodius Albinus died in battle.

8 Gorrie 2004, 63.

9 Gorrie 2004, 65.

her and the praetorian prefect and favourite of Septimius Severus, Plautian (?–205 CE), who sought to defame her as promiscuous to no avail – and yet the accusations stuck to her memory<sup>10</sup>. Given her strong ties to cults that are aimed at promoting female *pudicitia*, and her depiction as a virtuous wife and mother in the imperial propaganda<sup>11</sup>, it seems especially interesting that at least according to Cassius Dio, Septimius Severus did not put a stop to those accusations. Cassius Dio mentions several further things about her: She studied philosophy as a reaction to Plautian’s accusations<sup>12</sup>, felt joy (χαράν) after he was killed by Caracalla<sup>13</sup> and finally it says that she, being a Syrian, was ›crafty‹ – a trait passed on to Caracalla (τὸ πανούργον τῆς μητρὸς καὶ τῶν Σύρων)<sup>14</sup>.

5 Important sources of her status as empress are the titles bestowed upon her: as wife of the *augustus*, the title of *augusta* was a given. *Mater augusti* and *mater caesari* as well as later *mater augustorum* are self-explaining. A relatively new title was *mater castrorum* or even *mater invictorum castrorum*: the exact function behind this title is still debated, but it belongs to the military sphere and the first empress honoured as *mater castrorum* lived only a few years earlier: Faustina the younger<sup>15</sup>.

6 There are several monuments and artistic depictions of Julia Domna, ranging from reliefs to intaglios and statues. One famous example is the depiction of the Imperial family showing Julia Domna and Septimius Severus with their sons found in Egypt<sup>16</sup>. She also features in the coinage of her husband, both on coins minted for her and bearing her portrait, as well as on coins minted for her husband himself, with or without their sons<sup>17</sup>. When Septimius Severus died in 211 CE, Julia Domna lost her status as empress<sup>18</sup>.

## The Goddess Isis – a Short Introduction

7 One of the most prominent goddesses of Ancient Egypt remains Isis (Egypt. *ἰs.t*) to this day. In pre-Graeco-Roman times she was venerated in all of Egypt, with her main sanctuary being at the isle of Philae. Her epithets identify her as »strong of magical power« (*wr.t- ḥk3.w*) amongst others. Leaving aside the prevalence of syncretistic deities already in pharaonic Egypt, which sees her intermingled with other female deities such as Hathor, in Graeco-Roman times with Aphrodite, Gaia and Tyche, she was most closely tied to the legitimate succession and the throne, protection of children,

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10 Cass. Dio LXXVI, 15,6 f. – Contrary to Dio, Victor (Aur. Vict. Caes. 20) paints a different picture of the empress as debauched and participant of a conspiracy – and yet so beloved by her husband that he fails to act against her. He even goes as far as to claim she later seduced and married Caracalla, who he says was her stepson (Aur. Vict. Caes. 21).

11 Gorrie 2004, 64 f. 67. 71.

12 Cass. Dio LXXVI, 15,7.

13 Cass. Dio LXXVII, 4 f.

14 Cass. Dio LXXVII, 10. The word itself appears to have had a rather negative connotation, which is an unusual find since he usually paints her in a rather positive, albeit slightly tragic, light. For a discussion on the word and its use in the context of Julia Domna see Mallan 2013, 747 f. with fn 41.

15 See e. g. Speidel 2012.

16 Geta has been erased. Today in the Altes Museum Berlin, Inv.-no. 31320.

17 Some of the constellations shown on the coinage of Septimius Severus include the following: with Septimius Severus on the obverse and Julia Domna on the reverse: 161A; 161B; 273. – Julia Domna on the obverse and Septimius Severus on the reverse: 593; 603; 607. – Both on the obverse: 312. – Both on the reverse: 522 (obverse: Septimius Severus); 547 (obverse: Julia Domna). – Julia Domna and both of her sons on the reverse: 159; 175; 181A; 181B; 181C. – Julia Domna on the obverse and her sons on the reverse: 540; 541. – There are also coins showing Julia Domna on the obverse and only one of her sons on the reverse.

18 She was later famously present when Caracalla slew his brother. Still, she continued to fulfil duties for Caracalla during his reign such as reading his correspondence when he was absent (Cass. Dio LXXVIII, 3,2 f.). In 217 CE, Caracalla was killed and Julia Domna committed suicide, according to Cassius Dio because she did not want to return to the life of a commoner (Cass. Dio LXXIX, 23 f.).

sick and hurt people, apotropaic magic, and finally the protection (and mourning) of the dead.

8 Even nowadays and already in antiquity, the best-known<sup>19</sup> mythology sees her as the daughter of Nut and Geb, her siblings being her brother-husband Osiris, and her sister Nephthys and brother Seth, also married to one another. In Papyrus Chester-Beatty IV, the so-called »Contendings of Horus and Seth«, she is shown as the protector of her child Horus and of his claim to the throne. After Osiris, the king of Egypt, was killed and dismembered by Seth before having an heir to his throne, Isis and Nephthys collect all parts of Osiris' body except for his phallus, which had been eaten by either a fish or a crocodile. In order to be able to conceive, she forms a replacement phallus and revives her husband for one night. She falls pregnant and has to hide from Seth until Horus is old enough to challenge Seth for the throne. They fight both before the divine tribunal as well as in various contests, but no solution is found. Finally, the gods and goddesses retreat to an island, prohibiting Isis from coming along. She changes her form and comes anyway, and, in the shape of a beautiful widow tricks Seth into declaring his

own claim to the throne as illegitimate and the succession of the throne to the rightful heir can be finalised.

9 There are several episodes not found in P. Chester Beatty IV that show additional occasions that call for Isis as protector of Horus; these episodes often found their way into protective magic as well, especially against snakes and fever, even in Coptic times<sup>20</sup>.

10 In Graeco-Roman times, she gained a strong following outside Egypt that spread her cult all over the Roman Empire<sup>21</sup>. The Ptolemaic queens often styled themselves as Isis which might have added to the popularity of this goddess even in later times<sup>22</sup>. She is a main protagonist in Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*. Later, she is included in Roman literature such as Ovid's *Metamorphosis*<sup>23</sup>.

11 Within the varied mythology of Ancient Egypt, Isis has several functions, which can be reflected in her iconography: There is a »neutral« depiction which shows her first and foremost as goddess, for example when she is simply a goddess amongst other divinities. In a mortuary context, she can be shown as a mourner for the deceased Osiris together with her sister Nephthys. Moreover, they act as protectors of Osiris, and thus in extension of the deceased in general; in this context the sisters are often depicted on a shroud or coffin (Fig. 2).

12 There are some contexts and traditions in which Isis appears that only emerge during the Graeco-Roman period: the depiction of deities – and especially goddesses –



2

Fig. 2: Sarcophagus of the singer of Amun-Ra, Henuttawy, late 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty, with Isis and Nephthys as mourners on the feet (MET 25.3.182)

19 Due to the nature of this article, a comprehensive study on the many relevant sources on and mythologies including Isis from pharaonic and post-pharaonic Egypt cannot be given.

20 On this topic see e. g.: Dooso 2019.

21 On this topic see: Nagel 2019.

22 E. g. MET 89.2.660.

23 The story of Iphis and Ianthis (Ov. met. 9,666–797) tells the story of Iphis, born as daughter of a Cretan couple. The father wanted a male child and was set on killing a female one. The goddess Isis appeared to the mother in a dream and told her to keep the child no matter what, promising her help in time of need. When Iphis was born a girl, her mother raised her as a boy and she was betrothed to another girl, Ianthis. Shortly before their nuptials, Isis heard the prayers of Iphis and changed her into a man so the marriage could take place.



3



4

Fig. 3: Terracotta of Isis-Thermuthis, Graeco-Roman period (BM EA37495)

Fig. 4: Metal statuette of Isis *lactans* with cow horns and sun disk on her head (MET 17.190.1641)

as snakes gains traction from Ptolemaic times onwards. There seems to have been an earlier tradition given that a snake, the cobra, Gardiner sign I13 to be exact, has been used as a determinative for goddesses well before that time. Still, showing Isis as a snake with or without a human head is a rather late development and combines her with the snake-goddess Renenutet (Fig. 3).

13 Statuettes and depictions from outside of Egypt and/or of a later date can reduce her iconography until it is mainly the Isis-knot that identifies her, whereas other elements are less pronounced. One such example can be found on a textile that shows in a medallion the goddess (Isis-)Gaia: even though the inscription identifies her only as Gaia (ΓΗ), the Isis-knot, the corkscrew locks and rather reduced cow-horns with a sun-disk make it clear that this is a syncretic Isis-Gaia<sup>24</sup>.

14 For the following observations, three later aspects/types of Isis are relevant: Isis *lactans*, Isis *pelagia* and Isis-Aphrodite.

### Isis *lactans*

15 The depiction of Isis *lactans* shows her as a breastfeeding mother with her child Harpocrates (*hrw-p3-hrd* literally »Horus the child«) seated on her lap<sup>25</sup>. At least one of her breasts is bare, oftentimes both. A large number of small bronze statuettes show her with cow horns and the sun disk in between them (Fig. 4), statue(tte)s made of stone

24 Today in the Hermitage Museum.

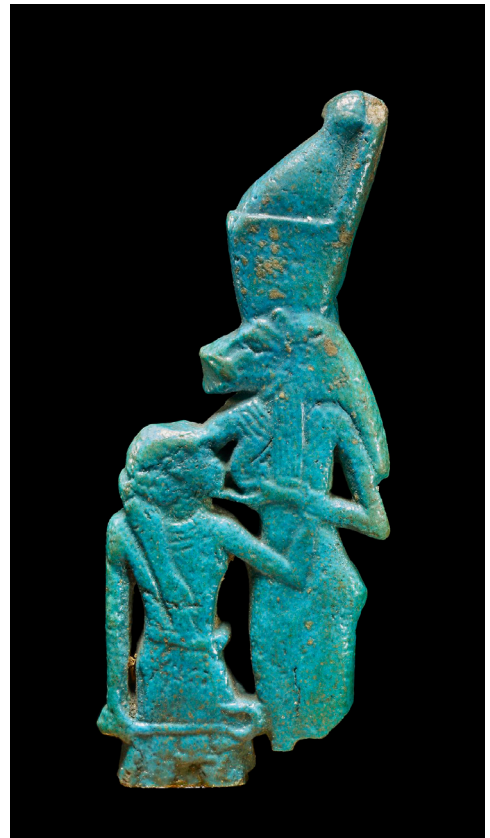
25 Especially in older research, there have been several attempts to see the iconography of Isis *lactans* as inspiration or predecessor of the Christian *Maria lactans* (e. g. Langener 1996). Due to the temporal overlap as well as the universality – both show a seated nursing mother, which happens to be a common depiction for human and divine mothers alike in several cultures – it seems more likely a coincidence than an adaption of Isis' iconography for the Christian Mary.

Fig. 5: Faience statuette of Isis *lactans* with hieroglyph Q1 on her head, Ptolemaic period (MET 55.121.5)



5

Fig. 6: Sekhmet-Mut suckling a king, Third Intermediate Period



6

or wood and faience can also show her with her name hieroglyph, the throne (Gardiner sign No. Q1, can be read as *s.t* – »throne« but also *3s.t* – »Isis« and *Wsjr* – »Osiris«) on her head (Fig. 5).

16 Isis *lactans* can be seen as part of a tradition of a goddess nursing a rightful and legitimate heir to the throne. Different goddesses can take the role of wet-nurse, one example would be Hathor (in her bovine form feeding the young Hatshepsut in the chapel of Hathor in the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari), another Sekhmet-Mut as seen on an amulet (Fig. 6).

### Isis pelagia

17 Isis *pelagia* is a rather late aspect of Isis that emerges in Roman times<sup>26</sup>. Here, Isis has the aspect of a sea-faring and marine deity. She is usually shown standing on a ship and holding its sail (Fig. 7). She can be iconographically close to depictions of Alexandria and of Tyche/Fortuna who also have a rudder as an attribute<sup>27</sup>. There is a marble statue in the National Museum of Athens that has been identified as Isis-Tyche-Pelagia<sup>28</sup>. The goddess is depicted as standing upright, holding a rudder in her right and a cornucopia in her left hand. Corkscrew locks and the knot between her breasts make the identification as Isis clear. In this time and incarnation, Isis is often paired with the Ptolemaic god Sarapis (also: Serapis)<sup>29</sup>, with whom she has Harpokrates as son.



7

Fig. 7: Reverse of a Tetradrachm of Hadrian from Alexandria showing Isis pelagia (American Numismatic Society 1944.100.56607)

26 See: von Lieven 2006.

27 Nauerth 1998, 194.

28 Inv.-No. 3426. A photo can be found online via <https://www.flickr.com/photos/telemax/3209867707/> (last access: 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023).

29 This god was in himself a syncretic deity created in Ptolemaic times: *Wsjr-hp* »Osiris-Apis« combined the god of the underworld, Osiris, with the venerated bull-deity Apis who was himself an aspect of Osiris.



## Isis-Aphrodite

18 A third type of Isis might be relevant for understanding these coins: The syncretic goddess Isis-Aphrodite. As mentioned above, Aphrodite is one of the foreign goddesses that Isis is regularly combined with. She is best known for the terracotta statuettes that depict the goddess in the nude except for her headdress – with or without the cow horns – and, sometimes, some accessories. Whilst the picture shown here from the Metropolitan Museum Isis-Aphrodite (Fig. 8) has a lavishly decorated *kalathos*, simpler versions exist, such as one kept in the Kraków museum<sup>30</sup>. Iconography-wise, these statuettes combine the corkscrew locks and the *kalathos*-headdress. They were associated with fertility<sup>31</sup>.

## The Coins in Question

19 There are three coin types minted under Septimius Severus for Julia Domna bearing the depiction in question: (a) two were minted both as aureus and denarius<sup>32</sup>, (b) one as sesterce<sup>33</sup>, meaning they come in three different denominations and all three main metals used for coinage at that time.

20 The coins (Figs. 9. 10) show the bust of Julia Domna on the obverse, she looks to the right and is draped; the legend reads »IVLIA 8 AVGVSTA«. On the reverse, a goddess commonly identified as Isis is depicted standing to the right. Her hair falls in corkscrew locks down to her shoulders, a *kalathos* rests on her head and a small bump can be seen in front of it. She is holding a child – interpreted as her son Horus – on her left leg that she has put onto the prow of a ship; behind her, a rudder can be seen leaning against an altar. Her right hand is



Fig. 8: Terracotta statuette of Isis-Aphrodite, c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE (MET 1991.76)



Fig. 9: Denar (RIC IV Sept. Sev. 577), minted in Rome, today in the collection Dr. Erich Roth of the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Inv. roth10116

9

30 Photos as well as a 3D-rendering are available under <https://ma.krakow.pl/en/tour/figurine-of-isis-aphrodite/> (last access: 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023).

31 There are older types of nude female figurines that are interpreted as relating to fertility and the (maybe unfulfilled) wish for children: Especially the group of the formerly so-called *Beischläferinnen*, which were usually found in a funerary context.

32 These are counted as a single type iconography-wise since they are identical except for their mint: RIC VI Sept. Severus 577 was minted in Rome between 196 and 211 CE whereas 645 was minted at *Latakia* (Syria) between 196 and 202 CE.

33 RIC VI Sept. Severus 865.



10

Fig. 10: Reverse of the same type as Fig. 9 from a different die (American Numismatic Society 1944.100.51309)

in front of her chest and holds a circular object with or without bulges<sup>34</sup> (Fig. 10). The legend of the obverse reads in all cases »SAECULI FELICITAS«<sup>35</sup>, with the sesterce having an added »S C«<sup>36</sup>.

21 The depiction of the goddess on these coins is rather peculiar: The way she wears her hair is consistent with other depictions of Isis in Graeco-Roman times<sup>37</sup>, as is the headdress; though an undecorated *kalathos* is more commonly seen on Serapis, there are examples of Isis-Aphrodite wearing one<sup>38</sup> – the *kalathos* seen on the coin of the American Numismatic Society (Fig. 10) is decorated. Her appearance is combined with elements of her iconographies: Isis *pelagia*<sup>39</sup> can be recognised in her position standing at least partially on a boat and including the rudder<sup>40</sup> and Isis *lactans* with the child on her lap hinting at her breastfeeding it, or, as one might describe her more fittingly here since a standing Isis *lactans* is indeed as of now

unknown, Isis *mater*<sup>41</sup>. The addition of the child, namely Harpokrates, being breastfed could indeed have been another iconographical determinant of Isis.

22 Susann Sowers Lusnia places the coins examined here in the sphere of »the security and stability of the Imperial family and its succession«<sup>42</sup> – as outlined above a main aspect of the veneration of Isis and already fully covered by Isis *lactans*. Yet, one may wonder why this common iconography was not chosen to convey the promise of dynastic stability and thus security: after all, at least in the Alexandrian coinage Isis *lactans* was a known motive, for example used on a coin of Antoninus Pius<sup>43</sup>. If indeed the coins show a combination of different Isis-types, there must have been deliberation behind the choice of motive.

34 Different dies can be identified for example by the position of the child and its arms, the shape of the object or the posture of the goddess. – Similar objects are held by a nude female figurine on a Coptic textile in the Düsseldorf collection (Inv.-No. 12923) in a maritime context. Interestingly, the descriptions of Julia Domna's coins usually fail to mention this object.

35 Can roughly be translated as »blessing of the era«.

36 S C = *senatus consultum* »by decree of the senate«, only on the sesterce.

37 Including the depictions of Ptolemaic queens as Isis, but also seen on Isis-Aphrodite and other types of Isis.

38 As mentioned above the statuette in Kraków.

39 Theoretically, the iconography of Isis *pharia* is also close; however there is no trace of the Alexandrian lighthouse (the *pharos* in question) so this one can be disregarded.

40 The rudder itself is not exclusive to Isis and can be seen with other goddesses such as Fortuna. Riccardo Bertolazzi suggests, that the prow here refers to the *navigium Isidis* and the rudder to Isis/Fortuna (Bertolazzi 2019, 469), whereas Rowan places it more decisively in the sphere of Fortuna (Rowan 2011, 252). It should be noted that the rudder may be one of the major attributes of Fortuna (alongside the wheel) but other entities can be shown with a rudder as well, for example Annona and Laetitia. There are also male gods holding rudders, especially those closely related to water (e.g. Septimius Severus 229). The rudder does not necessarily refer to Fortuna only.

41 It is certainly no coincidence that f. ex. at *Mogontiacum* (today: Mainz Kästrich) Isis was venerated alongside Mater Magna.

42 Lusnia 1995, 127.

43 Dattari 3044/Emmett 1587.8, R4.

## Potential Implications

23 Roman coinage was minted not only as a means of payment, but also as a medium for Imperial propaganda: the legends and depictions were carefully selected to visualise and spread the intended messages<sup>44</sup>. One of Julia Domna's most important roles in Imperial propaganda was that of a mother, namely the mother of a new dynasty, as is reflected in her titles. If the message that was supposed to be understood from these coins was only supposed to show this aspect, an Isis *lactans* would have been sufficient, especially since it can be assumed that this type of Isis was well-known enough throughout the Roman Empire.

24 One hypothesis would be as follows: Isis *lactans* was not fully suited to convey the intended message. One of the main deviations from the usual iconography of Isis *lactans* is the fact that she is not depicted as sitting. Sitting goddesses are a staple motive of Roman coinage, and yet the one type of seated goddess where sitting is basically an iconographic determinant was altered. By changing Isis' position from sitting to standing, the visual focus also shifts and with the inclusion of other aspects, the emphasis more clearly lies on her<sup>45</sup>. She is still shown as a mother, but that is not all she is. The rudder, mainly associated with Fortuna, in combination with the ship's prow might hint at the supply of grain that was brought from Egypt to Rome, showing her as a provider. By adding other attributes, she gains a more ›active‹ air and an importance of her own – which might be just the kind of message suitable for Julia Domna.

25 To sum it up and to return to the question by Rowan: this goddess is indeed clearly shown to be an Isis, or rather a compilation of multiple Isis-types – likely with an additional syncretic aspect to her<sup>46</sup>.

## Outlook

26 The field of numismatics remains a fringe area of Egyptological research even though the study of the usage and adaption of Egyptian motives on Roman coins is a promising field. This preliminary discussion of the coins of Julia Domna bearing a depiction of Isis with her son Horus shows that even such seemingly established motives are well worth further research. Within the limited scope of this article, the focus was on the iconography of Isis; other desirable lines of questioning from an Egyptological point of view would be the usage, transmission, adaption, and dissemination of Egyptian motives both within the Egyptian coinage and especially in the Roman coinage outside of the province *Aegyptus*.

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44 This does not apply to coinage only, of course, since it can be safely assumed that all official works were carefully curated for their intended effect. Unfortunately, no texts on the process of designing the coin types survive, meaning the exact workflow and reasonings remain unknown.

45 This is in contrast to the earlier examples of goddesses nursing an heir to the throne given above: Here, the emphasis lies on the heir who is accepted by a divine mother and fed her milk, meaning they were given divine validation.

46 Even though Tyche/Fortuna has so far been favoured, one might also consider Aphrodite/Venus – especially when keeping in mind the dream that saw Julia's and Septimius Severus' *thalamos* in the temple of Venus. This has been interpreted by C. T. Mallan as a sign of continuity (through the presence and thus blessing of Faustina the Younger) and of fertility (Venus being the mother of the Roman state itself; Mallan 2013, 738 f.).

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

### Eine aufrechte Mutter und Göttin

Einige vorläufige Betrachtungen zu einer ungewöhnlichen Darstellung der Isis mit ihrem Sohn Horus auf Münzen für Julia Domna

Julienne N. Schrauder

Im vorliegenden Artikel wird eine ungewöhnliche Darstellung der ägyptischen Göttin Isis mit ihrem Sohn Horus auf einer kleinen Gruppe von Münzprägungen für die römische Kaiserin Julia Domna, Ehefrau des Kaisers Septimius Severus, betrachtet. Als Grundlage für die Diskussion der Münzen wurde die Datenbank Online Coins of the Roman Empire (OCRE) verwendet.

## SCHLAGWÖRTER

Horus, Ikonographie, Isis, Julia Domna, römisch-kaiserzeitliche Numismatik

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